

# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

*This document is provided for historical purposes only.*

*Documents contained in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Document & Publication Archive may contain dated and/or incorrect information. The WDFW Document & Publication Archive is provided as a service to those interested in the history of fish and wildlife management in Washington State.*

Habitat management for



# **SHARP-TAILED GROUSE**



In the State of Washington

The sharp-tailed grouse, *Pedioecetes phasianellus*, often miscalled prairie chicken, was formerly found in great numbers throughout the bunchgrass prairie country of eastern Washington. Destruction of its native habitat by cultivation and overgrazing has drastically reduced its numbers. It is common now only in parts of Douglas, Lincoln, and Okanogan counties.

The courtship activity of the sharp-tail is an impressive performance. The males gather from a radius of several miles to a central location, where they perform an intricate dance that attracts the females. The same dancing grounds are used year after year. Mating is promiscuous, and takes place on the dancing grounds. The hens usually nest within a mile of the dancing grounds, laying a clutch averaging 12 eggs which hatch in June. Both sexes are alike in size and coloration, being similar to a hen pheasant although somewhat heavier and lacking the long tail.

## Habitat Needs

Plant Foods. Preferred foods include the buds, tender green leaves, fruit, or seeds of alfalfa, birch, chokecherry, clover, corn, cottonwood, dandelion, maple, mountain-ash, sunflower, sweetclover, wheat, and willow. Other important foods are alder, aspen, bearberry, bristlegrass, dogwood, gromwell, hawthorn, juniper, knotweed, oat, poisonoak, ragweed, raspberry, rose, Russian-olive, sagebrush, sedge, serviceberry, snowberry, and wyethia.

Animal Food, including ants, beetles, bugs (*Hemiptera*), caterpillars, grasshoppers, and spiders, may make up as much as 20 percent of the summer diet.

Cover. Preferred cover is bunchgrass prairie. In winter sharptails require a small amount of brush or trees, which supply food as well as cover.

Roosting is on the ground in grassland. They commonly roost under snow in winter.

Nesting is on the ground, usually in grassland, but sometimes in areas with scattered brush, or in grain fields.

Water. Sharptails do not require free water, but they will accept it if it is available. Ordinarily their water need is met by dew and succulent foods.

## Management Suggestions

Loss of habitat has been a vital factor in the decline of the sharp-tailed grouse in Washington. Management should stress preservation and improvement of existing habitat, both grassland and brush. Particular attention should be given to the preservation of dancing grounds.